

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Bastrop County, Inc Program Summary

CASA of Bastrop County, Inc provides a trained community volunteer advocate for every child who is removed from their home due to child abuse and neglect. CASA Volunteer Advocates advocate for the best interest of children in the Child Protective Services court system, making sure that their needs are met and they reach a safe, permanent and loving home. It is CASA's priority to help a child be reunified with his or her parents when it's in their best interest, but when it is not, CASA will work hard to help children reach a permanent home with relatives or adoptive parents. CASA of Bastrop County believes every child who has been abused or neglected deserves to have a dedicated advocate speaking up for his or her best interest in court, at school and in the three communities we serve. To accomplish this, CASA of Bastrop County Inc educates and empowers community volunteers who ensure each child's needs remain a priority in an over-burdened child welfare system. When the state steps in to protect a child's safety because the people responsible for protecting him or her have not, our judges appoints CASA of Bastrop County Inc to find a volunteer to make an independent and informed recommendation and help the judge decide what's best for the child.

CASA of Bastrop County, Inc is requesting funding to enhance already existing efforts in Bastrop, Fayette and Lee Counties, the service counties of our organization. It is our goal to increase community awareness of our CASA organization. Through these outreach efforts of presentations, attending community events such as parades, fairs, health fairs and other identified events we hope that this goal will be reached. The communities in these three counties need to understand that child abuse and neglect does exist in their communities but further that our organization is here to help these vulnerable children. In the course of these outreach efforts and education we anticipate that we will also be recruiting citizens who will want to become a CASA Volunteer. CASA volunteers come from every walk of life and share a commitment to improving children's lives, willingness to learn and an open mind towards life experiences different from their own. Volunteers complete an interview, background checks, and 30 hours of intensive training and courtroom observation. Upon completion these volunteers are sworn in by one of our the county judges, and then are appointed to a child or family of children and spend an average of 10-15 hours a month advocating for these children for at least a year. They get to know the child while also gathering information from the child's family, teachers, doctors, caregivers and anyone else involved in the child's life.

In addition, we are also requesting support to provide training materials for the 30 hour Volunteer Training as well as provide lunch for the participates of the trainings. We feel that it is imperative that we provide materials that will allow these volunteers to gain knowledge of the volunteer work, the judicial system and the steps to ensure that they are supporting the best interest of these children. And equally important is to make sure that the volunteers, who are dedicating their time, are provided refreshments and lunch during this 30-hour training.

CASA of Bastrop County Inc provides a mechanism for communities to care for their children with trained, supervised citizen Volunteer Advocates.

Section I: Contact Information

a. Contact Person:

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b. Organization:

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Section II: Organizational Description

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Bastrop County, Inc. established its non-profit status in 1987. The office is located in Bastrop, Texas. A volunteer Board of Directors supervises CASA of Bastrop County, Inc. Originally CASA of Bastrop County served only Bastrop County. In the late 2000's, the organization branched out to include Fayette and Lee Counties to its service area. Program staff includes the Executive Director, three Advocacy Supervisors and a part-time Bookkeeper. It is the mission and purpose of CASA of Bastrop County, Inc to provide trained community volunteers for every abused and neglected child in our court system. The volunteer speaks for the right of each child to have a safe, permanent, loving home. We educate the community on child abuse and neglect, emphasizing the importance of nurturing, healthy families. Unfortunately, child abuse and neglect is on the rise, but fortunately CASA Volunteers are assigned to advocate for the child's best interest in the Child Protection System (CPS). These volunteers can focus on giving that child or sibling group the individualized advocacy and attention they need. CASA volunteers save taxpayers money and children's futures by helping find safe, permanent homes as soon as possible. CASA volunteers get to know the child and gather information from everyone involved in the child/children's life, including family members, teachers, doctors, lawyers and social workers. They use the information they gather to report to the court and to advocate for the child's needs in the foster care system. Children who have a CASA volunteer are more likely to be adopted, half as likely to re-enter foster care, substantially less likely to spend time in long term foster care and more likely to have a plan for permanency. Children with a CASA volunteer get more help while in the system and are more likely to have a consistent, responsible adult presence. The children spend less time in foster care and are less likely to be bounced from home to home. They are more likely to do better in school.

During the last fiscal year, CASA of Bastrop County provided services to 343 children throughout Bastrop, Fayette and Lee Counties. About 85% of those children were removed from the home due to their parent's involvement in drugs. The remaining 15% of the children were removed due to sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect. The first goal for CPS and CASA is for the child/children to be reunified with their family however that doesn't happen as often as the agencies would like. When a child/children are removed from the home, parents are always offered a service plan to work over the year, which may or may not include: random drug test, mental health evaluation, parenting classes, and therapy to name a few. In most cases if the parent/parents complete the service plan the court system will allow for the children to be returned. In the event that this happens CPS and CASA will conduct un-announced visits to ensure that the parents and children are transitioning back as a family unit. Unfortunately, in most cases the parent's relinquish their parental rights or their parental rights are terminated. The children are then placed up for adoption. CASA volunteers continue to visit the children until they have found a family that will provide a safe, permanent home.

Section III: Program Description

It is CASA of Bastrop County, Inc intent to apply for a recognition grant. Through this grant opportunity, we will continue to build our Child Advocacy Program. The Child Advocacy Program is the heart of our organization as described in the organizational description listed above. Our intent is to provide more community awareness of CASA throughout all three rural counties. It is imperative that the citizens of these communities become educated about CASA, and the impact that CASA Volunteers have on the lives of children who are in the foster care system. Through this, it is also our goal to recruit community members from each county to become CASA Volunteers who will advocate for the best interest of the children CASA serves. The following goals will be focused on with potential funding through the Texas Rural Communities Grant.

Goal 1: Increase community awareness about CASA in the three county service area: Bastrop, Fayette and Lee Counties.

- Track the number of presentations given, including audience size and location
- Track the number of community events CASA participates in, including county, audience size and location.

Timeline: April 2014-December 2014

The CASA Executive Director will identify businesses, agencies, organizations and service groups throughout the three county service areas. Once these have been identified, it is our hope that we will be able to provide a presentation that will increase community awareness regarding the efforts of CASA and potentially seek interested citizens who will be interested in volunteering for CASA. We will also seek to participate in community events such as fairs, parades, health fairs and other identified events to also increase community awareness and recruitment efforts. Our efforts will be tracked as indicated above.

Goal 2: Increase the number of CASA Volunteers Advocates by 15

- Provide orientation/information sessions in each of the three counties, tracking the number, audience size and location
- Provide Volunteer Training in each county, tracking the participants, and county location.
- Track the number of participants sworn in as CASA Volunteer Advocates
- Track the number of new Volunteer Advocates taking a case

Timeline: April 2014-December 2014

CASA is a mechanism for communities to care for their children with trained, supervised citizen Volunteer Advocates. Our Child Advocacy Program runs solely on the committed CASA Volunteer Advocates. It is our intention to increase our recruitment efforts in Goal 1, which will potentially support the efforts in increasing our CASA Volunteer Advocates. It is imperative that each child who is removed from their home due to child abuse and neglect has a trained community volunteer to represent their interests in court. We will provide orientation/information sessions in each of the three counties. Through these sessions citizens will be provided an overview of what a CASA Volunteer Advocate is, as well as be able to ask questions regarding the work. Once these have been completed we will then schedule Volunteer Advocate Training in each of the three counties. After the 30 hour Volunteer Advocate Training, volunteers will be sworn in by one of the county judges. Volunteer Advocates are then able to accept a case. We will again track all the information listed above.